



Department of Conservation and Recreation
Stewardship Council Meeting
May 4, 2007
Community Boating, Boston, MA

Meeting Minutes

Stewardship Councilors in Attendance: Chairman Dick Cross, Councilors Whitney Hatch, Laura Johnson, Henry Lee, and John Natoli.

Public Attendees: Carol Ann Berkowitz, Protect Our Water Resources; James McCaffey, Sierra Club; Mike Ryan, Friends of the Fells.

DCR Staff in Attendance: Acting Commissioner Priscilla Geigis, Stephanie Cooper, Jonathan Yeo, Marianne Fleckner, Anne Fiesinger, Jim DiMaio, Marcelle Valentin and Joe Rotondo.

I. **Call To Order (1:15 p.m.), Councilor Cross**

- a. There has been no news on the appointment of a new Commissioner as of date, but the process is moving forward and the Council will have advance notice of the appointment.
- b. The Council talked about ongoing discussions between Secretary Ian Bowles and EOT Secretary Bernard Cohen regarding the DCR roadways and bridges.

II. **Commissioner's Report, Acting Commissioner Priscilla Geigis**

- a. The Boston Marathon took place this month and despite the rain storm the DCR staff did a terrific job in their response to ensure the marathon was a success.
- b. Park Serve Day 2007 takes place next week on Saturday, May 12. As of the meeting, the agency had lined up 50 volunteer projects across the state. On April 20th with the support of the Governor's office and the Secretary's office, we launched a website where volunteers can register for Park Serve Day. Since that time, over 300 people have registered through the website and we expect another 400 people to participate as a result of our partners' efforts.
- c. Another key initiative is *The Great Park Pursuit* – a Massachusetts Outdoor Family Adventure which launches on May 19, 2007. We have a coalition of more than 30 environmental, youth, community group, business, and state agency partners that are working with DCR to promote this six-week event series. We have also reached out to other parties we hope will assist in program promotion, including schools, libraries, and DCR friends groups and other partners, and have provided information to legislators and press, statewide. We are providing you today with some updated information on the event series, and hope you will share it with your family and friends, as well as organizations to which you belong that may not yet joined us as Coalition Partners for the program.
- d. Acting Commissioner Geigis continued with an overview of some recent events DCR sponsored at our facilities such as Earth Day celebrated on April 22nd, Arbor Day which highlights the important role of the public in stewardship of our natural resources, and Invasive Species Day, where volunteers helped DCR eradicate invasive plants at the Middlesex Fells Reservation. Another recent event was the April 28th Boston Arbor Day tree-planting event, where Acting Commissioner Geigis joined Mayor Menino and he announced the city's new tree canopy goals. At that event, DCR made a commitment to spend \$60,000 per year for ten years on tree-planting in DCR Boston-area parks and \$20,000 per year for five years in urban forestry grants for tree-planting city-wide.
- e. Public meetings were held regarding the pathway rehabilitation project at the Chestnut Hill Reservation, the Draft Resource Management Plan for Mount Watatic Reservation, and plans to incorporate bicycle lanes along Brush Hill Road and Truman Parkway, from Mattapan Square in

Boston to Paul's Bridge in Readville and the Neponset Valley Parkway in Readville and Milton. Public meetings were also held to discuss a possible pedestrian crossing over the Mystic River in the vicinity of the Amelia Earhart Dam in Somerville and Everett and extension of the Draw 7 Park bike path through the MBTA's Charlestown Bus Maintenance Facility to Route 99. Finally, DCR held a public meeting to describe plans to replace the cherished "Wedding Tree" at Pilgrim Memorial State Park, which the Town of Plymouth had identified as a public safety hazard and requested be removed. The Arnold Arboretum has rooted some cuttings of the tree, which are housed in a nursery at Mt. Greylock. These will be used next year to grow a tree that is genetically identical to the "Wedding Tree" in its place.

- f. DCR has published our 2007 *Seasonal Employee Handbook*, which will be distributed to our 1,700 seasonal employees as they come on board. This Handbook communicates our mission, policies and procedures and underscores the value we place in our seasonal employees as vital team members and a key support to our year-round staff.
- g. DCR field staff that interact with the public will be sporting new DCR windbreakers. As part of their new summer uniform, these will help project professionalism and consistency within our operations.
- h. On May 2, an orientation program was held for staff mentors who will participate in the Park Fellow Program at Quinsigamond State Park in Worcester. The goals of the Park Fellow Program are to inspire young people interested in parks management and related fields to consider a career with DCR.
- i. DCR is implementing a regular schedule for routine maintenance in urban areas that will guide our operations throughout the recreation season, which are now posted on the DCR website. The agency aims to expand this program during the next year to the Division of State Parks, which has begun planning efforts toward that end.
- j. The Nor'easter of April 15-18 will take us some time to recover and repair damage that occurred as a result of the storm. DCR worked in close coordination with MEMA on urban flood control activities and on emergency response with respect to storm impacts on coastal structures, and with MEMA, MHD, and local DPW crews on dam stabilization activities. DCR is tracking and estimating costs, and will be submitting a request through MEMA for approximately \$1 million in federally-funded reimbursement on storm-related costs.
- k. DCR is currently developing specific operating schedules for beaches and pools for the 2007 recreation season. Among the goals of the agency are to institute services at all major beach facilities, including parking facilities, toilet facilities, water quality testing procedures, and general facility maintenance, by Memorial Day; to begin lifeguard services at DCR's most popular beach facilities on Memorial Day weekend and at all DCR beaches by Father's Day weekend; and, to begin operations at all spray and wading pool facilities by Memorial Day, and at all swimming pools by Father's Day. The agency is seeking to enhance beach and pool safety through the introduction of an expanded waterfront program procedures manual, through ongoing improvements in safety signage at all beaches and pools, and by investing in seasonal staff training, equipment, and supplies to improve lifeguard effectiveness.
- l. Early seasonal hiring dates have resulted in the employment of 412 seasonal staff by the first of May. With the early hires, DCR has been able to get a jump start on park readiness, forest fire detection and suppression, April storm clean-up projects, and a variety of programming and training initiatives.
- m. DCR's capital program is delivering a number of facility and service improvements that will enhance our visitors' experiences for the 2007 recreation season. These include: Phase II of the Neponset Reservation project; new comfort stations at Erving State Forest and Demarest Lloyd State Park and significant rehabilitation of the Walden Pond State Reservation comfort station;

Nahant Beach Bathhouse restoration; yurt camping at October Mountain State Forest; causeway repairs at Castle Island and, as a first step toward reconstruction, demolition of the shade shelter on the causeway; and continuing improvements at Spectacle Island Park, including installation of a sewer line, marina improvements, and dredging.

- n. DCR received a recent approval by the Massachusetts House of Representatives of \$97.3 million in operating funding for DCR in their version of the FY 2008 General Appropriation Act. This amount includes dedicated expenditures of \$4.2 million that will benefit DCR properties, and, of that amount, \$2 million to provide better maintenance and services to the Metropolitan beaches. We are working with the Senate Committee on Ways and Means to further a number of the Governor's objectives in H. 1, including the even distribution of additional funds, and to direct expansion funding to DCR retained revenue accounts.
- o. Acting Commissioner Geigis responded to a few public comments made at the last Stewardship Council meeting on forest management issues. The first comment focused on the timber sale at Myles Standish State Forest and on this would occur after the property was designated as a Forest Reserve by the Commonwealth last year. The second comment was regarding the suggestion that DCR parks should be considered in a separate category from forests with respect to forest management and that they should be exempted from the green certification mandate. Both Chief Forester Jim DiMaio and Acting Deputy Commissioner for Operations Jonathan Yeo were present and provided details about both issues.

III. **Committee Updates and Meeting Schedules**

a. Finance Committee, *Whitney Hatch*

- i. There was continued discussion on the amendment for additional funding for the Gap Analysis Project and Resource Management Plans. He is working on the senate side to help advocate the approval of the funds.
- ii. Beach commission made a recommendation for an oversight committee and Councilor Lee stated that the Stewardship Council should be part of the oversight committee.

b. Resource Management Plan Committee, *Henry Lee*

- i. There was discussion over the Resource Management Planning amending mandates, even with an increase in the House 1 Budget for FY2008 for DCR, no funding was provided.
- ii. Councilor Lee discussed the hopes of having the second draft ready by June regarding the Resource Management Plan project for the Stony Brook location now that the Urban Parks, South Region has an area Regional Engineer.

c. Policy Committee, *Laura Johnson*

- i. Councilor Johnson cited the Historic Parkways Initiative Annual Parkway Improvement Plan report outline and the Council requested input on the annual parkway plan, to be presented in the fall. The description of the plan with the solicited input from the Policy Subcommittee will be circulated in the next meeting.

IV. **Approval of Minutes from April 13, 2007 meeting**

All were in favor of the minutes from April 13, 2007.

V. **Meeting Schedule** – Next meeting will be Thursday, June 7 at Skinner Park in Hadley.

VI. **Public Comment**

- a. **Carol Ann Berkowitz** of Protect Our Water Resources representing CSPAC Lake Cochituate advisory group noted the need for intervention or additional help to maintain quality of the parks

in regards to a high rise development. The high rise developments that will occur over Lake Cochituate will replace the amazing scenery and outlook, removing the aesthetics. The Planning Board of Appeals are asking for DCR and the Stewardship Council to step in and help maintain the quality of the parks by protecting against high rise developments in the area. A signed copy of the letter of appeal will be sent to Chairman Cross. Acting Commissioner stated that we do not have direct authority to stop any development that is not on our property but for developments adjacent to DCR properties, we have the right to provide comments. There will be follow up from DCR Legal Counsel Tom LaRosa regarding zoning, statutes, and where DCR may be involved in proposed developments.

- b. **James McCaffey** of the Sierra Club informed the Stewardship Council about the upcoming event, Partners in Parks Conference which joins park advocates, state agency personnel and supporting organizations to celebrate and further invest in Massachusetts' public lands in a statewide working session. James McCaffey inquired if DCR has the ability to demonstrate a stronger voice regarding the zone around its property relative to proposed development. He also noted that while DCR has received more funds in recent budget discussions, but that Resource Management Plans have not been funded. He will send a letter to the Senate Ways & Means to advocate for more funding. He gave the Council a copy of the letter regarding the MEPA and Section 61 Commitments for Wachusett Mountain Ski Area and Princeton Municipal Light. He briefly explained the concerns the Sierra Club has with the expansion of the ski area at Mt. Wachusett, the steps that have been taken to ensure compliance with MEPA and the various commitments that were made. He requested that the Council review the document for further discussion and comments at the next Stewardship Council meeting. Chairman Cross asked DCR Legal Counsel, Tom LaRosa to research and brief the Council at the next meeting regarding the ongoing discussion of Princeton Municipal and MEPA guidelines.
- c. **Mike Ryan** of the Friends of the Fells had inquiries regarding Secretary Cohen's public comments about plans for Mass Highway to take on some responsibility for DCR roads and bridges. Acting Commissioner Geigis will follow up with more information at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned 2:25 pm